

Message Text

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21

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01 AID-20 IO-14

DRC-01 /140 W

----- 003595

P 010801Z MAY 74

FM AMCONSUL LAHORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9988

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY

AMCONSUL KARACHI

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LAHORE 0646

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: MAY DAY TENSION IN LAHORE

REF: A. LAHORE 0642; B. LAHORE 0645

BEGIN SUMMARY: TENSION ROSE DRAMATICALLY IN LAHORE APRIL 30 FOLLOWING ASSASSINATION OF LOCAL LABOR LEADER. FORMER CHIEF MINISTER KHAR AND FOUR LIEUTENANTS WERE ROUGHED UP LATE APRIL 30 WHEN THEY TRIED TO PACIFY CROWDS OF WORKERS PROTESTING KILLING, AND KHAR LATER ANNOUNCED CANCELLATION OF MAY DAY PROCESSION HE HAD PLANNED TO LEAD. LARGE CROWDS OF DEMONSTRATORS NONE-THELESS BEGAN GATHERING EARLY MAY 1, POSSIBLY INCLUDING BIG CONTINGENT OF KHAR FOLLOWERS, AND POLICE REPORT HIGH POTENTIAL FOR TROUBLE. TRAIN AND BUS TRAFFIC WAS BLOCKED FOR OVER 10 HOURS APRIL 30, BUT INTERVENTION OF FEDERAL SECURITY FORCE CONTINGENTS ALLOWED MOST TRAINS AND SOME BUSES TO MOVE IN EARLY HOURS MAY 1. SOME POLITICAL OBSERVERS HAVE ALREADY WRITTEN OFF RAMAY GOVERNMENT AND HAVE PREDICTED SPEEDY DECREASE IN POPULARITY OF PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO THROUGHOUT PUNJAB. END SUMMARY.

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1. TEMPERS REACHED FLASH POINT IN LAHORE APRIL 30, FOLLOWING ASSASSINATION OF LABOR LEADER ABDUR REHMAN. SWARMS OF WORKERS STOPPED WORK IN FACTORIES AND POURED INTO STREETS, STOPPING TRAFFIC AND FORMING PROCESSIONS TO MARCH ON PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY AND RESIDENCES OF GOVERNOR AND CHIEF MINISTER. SEVERAL GROUPS OF DEMONSTRATORS BLOCKED BUS AND TRAIN TRAFFIC IN AND OUT OF CITY FOR OVER 10 HOURS (INCLUDING EXPRESS TRAIN TO KARACHI WHICH HAD ON BOARD DEPARTING USIS LAHORE IO).

2. FORMER CHIEF MINISTER KHAR AND FOUR TOP LIEUTENANTS VENTURED OUT IN LATE AFTERNOON APRIL 30 IN ATTEMPT CALM CROWDS, BUT WERE MET WITH CRIES OF "GO HOME KHAR -- MURDERER OF WORKERS*" CROWDS THEN JUMPED FIVE MEN AND ROUGHED THEM UP BEFORE POLICE INTERVENED WITH TEAR GAS AND FREED KHAR. KHAR SUBSEQUENTLY ANNOUNCED HE HAD DECIDED TO CANCEL PLANNED MAY DAY PROCESSION HE WAS TO LEAD NEXT DAY, BUT POLICE LATER RECEIVED REPORTS THAT KHAR'S FOLLOWERS PLANNED TO FORCE HIM TO GO AHEAD WITH MARCH ON ASSEMBLY.

3. LARGE GROUPS OF DEMONSTRATORS CONVERGED ON CENTER OF CITY MORNING OF MAY 1, AND BY 1200 POLICE ESTIMATED THAT 30,000 HAD REACHED CITY HALL. POLICE REPORTED THAT SEVERAL OTHER PROCESSIONS HAD STARTED FOR SAME SITE BY 1100, AND WARNED CAR OWNERS NOT TO ATTEMPT TO MOVE ALONG PROCESSION ROUTES, INCLUDING MAIN HIGHWAYS LEADING INTO CITY. MEANWHILE, LONG CARAVANS OF TRUCKS AND BUSES CARRYING DEMONSTRATORS CONTINUE TO PASS CONGEN, AND OTHER VEHICLES ARE REPORTED ROAMING THROUGHOUT CITY APPARENTLY LOOKING FOR TROUBLE. POLICE SAY THEY HAVE THEIR HANDS FULL, EVEN THOUGH THEY HAVE BEEN REINFORCED BY CONTINGENTS OF FEDERAL SECURITY FORCE. THEY EXPECT TENSION TO CONTINUE THROUGHOUT DAY, AND SAY IF POTENTIAL CLASHES OF WORKERS PRODUCE INJURIES OR DEATHS, UNSETTLED SITUATION COULD CONTINUE FOR DAYS.

4. POLICE HAVE ARRESTED TWO SUSPECTS IN REHMAN KILLING, BUT HAVE REFUSED TO IDENTIFY THEM. LOCAL FACTORY OWNER WHOSE LABOR WAS ORGANIZED BY REHMAN NOTED APRIL 30 THAT REHMAN HAD LAST WEEK PERSONALLY BEAT UP WORKER BELONGING TO RIVAL UNION AT PACKAGES, LTD., AND SAID KILLING MIGHT HAVE BEEN RETRIBUTION. HOWEVER, HE ADDED THAT WAY REHMAN WAS KILLED COULD INDICATE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POLITICAL ASSASSINS, SINCE THEY ARE USUALLY BETTER ARMED. FACTORY OWNER SAID REHMAN WAS CONSIDERED ALLY OF CHIEF MINISTER RAMAY. (REHMAN WAS SHOT DEAD INSIDE LOCAL HOSPITAL BY SIX MEN ARMED WITH STEN GUNS. HE HAD RUN INTO HOSPITAL AFTER MEN UNSUCCESSFULLY TRIED TO RUN HIM DOWN ON ROAD.)

5. MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED SAY IT IS TOO EARLY TO PREDICT WHAT EFFECT REHMAN DEATH WILL HAVE

ON PUNJAB POLITICS. HOWEVER, TWO GENERALLY THOUGHTFUL PUNJABIS, PERHAPS IN EXCITEMENT OF MOMENT, HAVE TOLD US THEY BELIEVE DEATH AND SUBSEQUENT LABOR TROUBLES WILL CAUSE DOWNFALL OF RAMAY GOVERNMENT BECAUSE IT WAS UNABLE TO KEEP SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. (THEY NOTED THAT SEVERAL UNION LEADERS HAVE CALLED FOR GENERAL STRIKE IN LAHORE UNTIL REHMAN KILLERS ARE CAUGHT BY POLICE.) THEY ARGUE THAT FAILURE TO MEET WORKERS DEMANDS, TOPPED OFF BY REHMAN DEATH AND SUBSEQUENT CLASHES HAS ALREADY WEAKENED BHUTTO'S POPULARITY IN PUNJAB, AND FORESEE VIRTUAL CRUMBLING OF HIS WRIT IN PROVINCE OVER NEXT SEVERAL DAYS.
GRIFFIN

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